

VIEWPOINTS

Influencing Admissions Decisions

Stephanie F. Gardner, PharmD, EdD

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

A recent editorial in *Academic Medicine* focused on the integrity in the admissions process at colleges of medicine.¹ At the core of the issue stands the very real potential that deans will face intense political or economic pressure in making admissions decisions. The author stressed the importance of adhering to the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) Standards MS-4 and MS-7, which state that “The final responsibility for selecting students to be admitted for medical study must reside with a duly constituted faculty committee.” LCME regards meeting this standard as critical for qualifying for accreditation.

The American Council on Pharmaceutical Education Accreditation (ACPE) Standards and Guidelines address admissions decisions for colleges of pharmacy. Whereas LCME standards state the foundational importance of having the committee completely responsible for admissions decisions, ACPE Standard 17 states that “the dean and a duly constituted committee of the college or school must share the final responsibility for enrollment and selection of students.” ACPE standards do not further define the composition of the admissions committee, the role of the dean in the selection process, or the relative weight that either party exerts in the process.

Colleges of pharmacy have applied numerous approaches to the admissions selection process. The decision process is likely influenced by the committee’s composition and by the leadership provided to the committee. Some committees are comprised solely of faculty members, while others include practitioners and/or students. Faculty members on admissions committees may be elected at large or may be appointed by the dean. The chair of the committee may be elected by the committee or appointed by an administrator of the college, or may be a college administrator, such as an associate dean. This creativity and variety testify to a continuing commitment to evolve processes that ensure the best admissions decisions.

At some institutions, the dean’s role in admissions may be openly active. For instance, the dean may serve as a committee member. In others, the dean might select students from an alternate list, or bring student applicants back to the committee in an appeal process. In the most limited model, the dean would provide only the charge to the committee, and then exercise little direct involvement.

Ultimately, the integrity of the admissions process might best be served by having a committee make final admissions decisions, thereby limiting the dean to charging the committee, based on the mission of the individual college. The dean would ensure that the committee has the information needed to select the best students based on the ultimate goal of recruitment.

I propose that our academy urge ACPE to consider further defining accreditation-linked expectations for the admissions process. Colleges should continue independently to examine the integrity of their own procedures for admissions. If procedures fail to uphold the integrity of this process, the school must make changes. Bylaws must ensure that the selection and composition of the committee is appropriate and that the dean’s role is one of supporting the committee rather than personally influencing outcomes. AACP should consider emphasizing the importance of admissions during sessions for new deans. Scholars new to this administrative role need preparation for the requests for admission consideration from highly influential individuals.

Every school or college of pharmacy has an inalienable interest in admitting the best students into our profession. Ensuring the integrity of this process is essential if we are to remain true to our academic ideals.

REFERENCES

1. Kanter SL. Assuring the integrity of medical school admission decisions. *Academic Medicine* 2008;83(7):623-4.

Corresponding Author: Stephanie F. Gardner, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, 4301 W. Markham St, #522, Little Rock, AR, 72205, United States. Tel: 501-686-5558. Fax: 501-686-8315. E-mail: sfgardner@uams.edu